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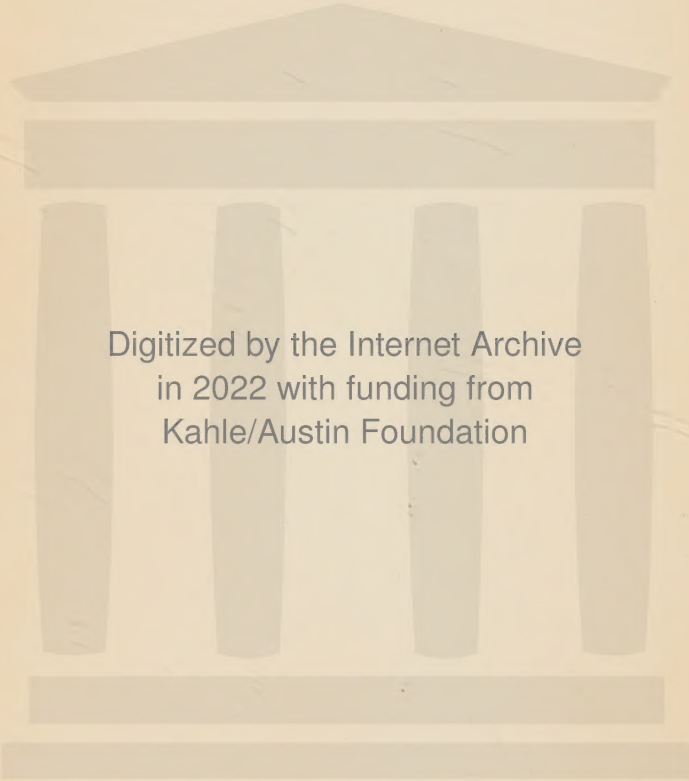
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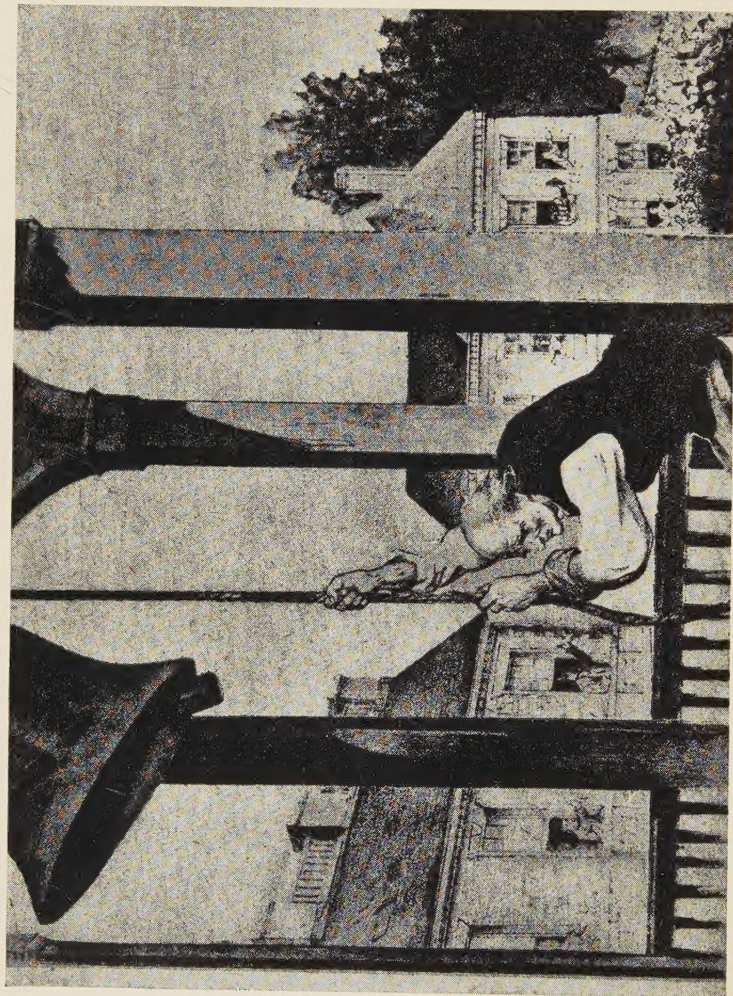
ANDREW McNAIR  
AND THE LIBERTY BELL  
1776



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*An old print copied in New York Times Magazine, December 27, 1925. Courtesy of George McNair*

ANDREW MCNAIR RINGING THE LIBERTY BELL

ANDREW McNAIR  
AND THE  
LIBERTY BELL  
1776

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MARY D. ALEXANDER

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1929

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## ANDREW McNAIR AND THE LIBERTY BELL, 1776<sup>1</sup>

Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.

The doorkeepers of the Assembly of Pennsylvania were the official ringers of the Liberty Bell. The following is a revised list of these men and is more complete than that given in the *Independence Hall Bulletin* and in the *Pennsylvania Archives*:<sup>2</sup>

Edward Kelley,<sup>2</sup> 1753-55; David Edward,<sup>2</sup> 1755-58; Andrew McNair,<sup>3</sup> October 16, 1758—February 18, 1777; Jacob Lehre,<sup>4</sup> February 18, 1777—March 4, 1777; William Hurry,<sup>5</sup> March 4, 1777—November 3, 1780; Thomas Bowling,<sup>2</sup> 1827-36.

<sup>1</sup> The material used here first appeared as "The Ringers of the Liberty Bell," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XVIII (October, 1925), 658-67. For additional confirmation see Victor Rosewater, *The Liberty Bell*. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1926.

<sup>2</sup> (a) *Independence Hall Bulletin No. 2*. "The Liberty Bell." Department of Public Works, Bureau of City Property, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1923.

(b) Messengers and Doorkeepers of the Assembly. *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, IX, 638.

<sup>3</sup> (a) *Collections of the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania*. Henry Miller, printer, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Vol. I-VI (1776), (University of Chicago Library), Vol. V, pp. 1, 85, 128, 188, 231, 280, 374, 432, 499; Vol. VI, pp. 2, 110, 193, 263, 335, 421, 484, 547, 623, 765, 766.

(b) *Journals of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. Vol. I, from November 28, 1776, to October 2, 1781. John Dunlap, printer, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. MDCCLXXXII (University of Chicago Library). Vol. I, pp. 98, 112.

(c) *Journals of the American Congress: From 1774 to 1788*. Vol. I (September 5, 1774, to December 31, 1776), pp. 50, 143. Washington, D.C., 1823. *Loc. cit.* Edited by W. C. Ford, Washington, D.C. Government Printing office, 1905. Vol. II (May 10 to September 20, 1775), p. 12; Vol. III (September 21 to December 30, 1775), p. 259; Vol. VIII (May 22 to October 2, 1777), p. 640.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3b</sup>), pp. 112 and 123.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3b</sup>), pp. 123, 319, 527.

Andrew McNair is the most interesting of these men, not only because of his long service, but because during his eighteen years' employment the Bell announced most of the important events leading up to and including the Declaration of Independence, as the following account shows.<sup>6</sup>

On September 12, 1764, it rang to call the Assembly together to acquaint them with the instructions sent to London by the Massachusetts Assembly in regard to the repealing of the Sugar Act and the prevention of the imposing of other taxes. On September 22, the Bell again called the Assembly when that body wrote a similar letter to London.

On September 9, 1765, the Bell rang to call the Assembly to consider a plan for the First Congress of the Colonies. On September 21, 1765, the Bell convened the Assembly to consider the Act of Parliament imposing stamp and other duties upon the British subjects in America.

The next important occasion on which the Bell was rung was on October 5, 1765, when it was muffled and tolled as the ship bearing stamps for Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland came up the Delaware. On October 31, 1765, the Stamp Act went into operation, and the Bell was again muffled and tolled. On September 20, 1766, the Bell called the Assembly together to vote the last 4000 £ for the King's use.

Town meetings of citizens were called by the ringing of the Bell on April 26, 1768, July 30, 1768, and September 27, 1770, all for the purpose of protesting against taxation and the other indignities imposed by Parliament.

On February 4, 1771, the Assembly was called when a petition was sent to the King for a repeal of the duty on tea. On October 18, 1773, a town meeting was called by the Bell, passing resolutions against buyers and vendors of tea, and on December 27, another town meeting was called to pass the resolution that the tea in the ship "Polly" should not be landed.

<sup>6</sup> *Philadelphia, History of Its Growth, etc.* Philadelphia Joint Councils; Joint Special Committee on Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Philadelphia, 1904.

On June 1, 1774, when the Port of Boston was closed, the Bell was muffled and tolled, and on June 18, the Bell called another town meeting, when the people pledged the city to the cause of liberty. On April 25, 1775, the day after the first news of the battle of Lexington reached Philadelphia, another public meeting was called.

And on July 8, 1776, the Bell was rung for the Proclamation of Independence and was again tolled at the conclusion of the reading. On September 26, 1777, the Bell called together for the last time the Assembly of Pennsylvania.

The earliest record yet found about McNair was that of his marriage in Pennsylvania in November, 1746,<sup>7</sup> to Mary Jennings. Probably he was a Scotch or Scotch-Irish Presbyterian as are all the McNairs so far known in America.<sup>8</sup> From at least 1769<sup>9</sup> to his death he lived in the South ward of Philadelphia, at which time he owned taxable property valued at 450 £<sup>10</sup> which his widow owned until as late as 1783.<sup>11</sup> On January 21, 1774, Andrew McNair, with David Kennedy and Jos. Dean, signed as witnesses the will of George Kemble, Philadelphia (Yeoman).<sup>12</sup>

Like Paul Revere and many others who served the cause of Liberty, Andrew McNair was a Freemason. The records<sup>13</sup> show that on November 21, 1755, he was passed to the second degree by the Freemason's Lodge Philadelphia No. 2 of the Moderns. The Mason's lodge, or first Masonic Hall of Philadelphia, was located on the south side of Lodge Alley, above Second Street in that city. It was built of brick and was erected in 1754, just one year before

<sup>7</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, Vol. 2, pp. 64-165. Also *op. cit.* (<sup>3b</sup>), pp. 131, 279.

<sup>8</sup> James B. McNair, *McNair, McNear, and McNeir Genealogies*. University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 1923.

<sup>9</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, Third Series, Vol. XIV, p. 182; Vol. XV, p. 741.

<sup>10</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, Third Series, Vol. XV, p. 741.

<sup>11</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, Third Series, Vol. XVI, p. 785.

<sup>12</sup> Information given by Miss Jennie Graham McGuire, May 20, 1926, and obtained by her from the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

<sup>13</sup> Julius F. Sachse, "Roster of Freemason's Lodge, Philadelphia, No. 2 of the Moderns," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. XXXI, p. 26. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1907.

Andrew McNair took his second degree. During the Revolution it was occupied by the Council of Safety and the Board of War. It was from this building, on the morning of July 8, 1776, that the assemblage marched to the State House (now called Independence Hall) to hear the Declaration of Independence read in public<sup>14</sup> for the first time.

There is some doubt as to who actually rang the Liberty Bell on July 8, 1776. For although Andrew McNair was the official bellman for the occasion, he may not have actually rung the Bell. The history of the old Pine Street church (Third Presbyterian) *Leaves from a Century Plant*, page 183, gives William Hurry the credit for ringing the Bell on this day. An investigation of the records of the Assembly of Pennsylvania shows that at the annual election of officers for the Assembly<sup>15</sup> on October 17, 1775, Andrew McNair was appointed doorkeeper for the ensuing year. Likewise on November 29, 1776<sup>16</sup> he was unanimously re-elected. Under incidental expenses of the Assembly for the year 1776 is found the statement that Andrew McNair was paid as doorkeeper.<sup>17</sup> However, the assembly, perhaps setting an example for present day practice, was adjourned from June 14, 1776, to August 26, 1776,<sup>18</sup> and therefore was not in session on July 8. It was customary for the doorkeepers of the Assembly at that time to also serve in a similar capacity for the Continental Congress and McNair is found thus employed. The records of the Continental Congress show that he was chosen their doorkeeper September 22, 1775.<sup>19</sup> On May 11, 1776, he was paid for attendance and for candles in full of his account to April 30, 1776.<sup>20</sup> On November 13, 1776,<sup>21</sup> the following entry is found: "To Andrew McNair, for his attendance on Congress 146 days, cleaning house, etc., to the first of November, 118 81/90 dollars." An actual count shows that Congress was in session 148 days between April 30, 1776, and November 1, 1776, consequently Andrew

<sup>14</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, Vol. I, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3a</sup>), Vol. VI, p. 623.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3a</sup>), Vol. VI, pp. 765, 766.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3b</sup>), Vol. I, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3a</sup>), Vol. VI, p. 743.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3c</sup>), Vol. I (1823), p. 143; Vol. II (1905), p. 259.

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3c</sup>), Vol. IV (1905), p. 349.

<sup>21</sup> *Op. cit.* (<sup>3c</sup>), Vol. VI (1905), p. 949.



James O'Neil 502

Aug. 13, 1777

976 To Charles Thomson Esq. for sundries paid for by him to Andrew McNair late doorkeeper of Congress. . . .

"That there is due to Charles Thomson, Esqr. for sundries paid for by him to Andrew McNair late doorkeeper of Congress. . . ."—Treasury Report of American Congress, August 13, 1777.

1776  
Nov. 13

To Andrew McNair for his attendance on Congress 146 days, cleaning house do to 1 Nov. 118<sup>81</sup>/<sub>90</sub> Dollars

Ordered That the said account be paid.

"To Andrew McNair for his attendance on Congress 146 days, cleaning house do to 1 Nov. 118<sup>81</sup>/<sub>90</sub> Dollars. . . ."—Journal of the American Congress, November 13, 1776.

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BELL RINGER IN 1776





McNair served all but two days of this time. Perhaps one of these days was July 8, 1776.

If William Hurry rang the Bell on this day he must have done so unofficially for he is not mentioned in the notes of the Pennsylvania Assembly for 1776 nor in the journal of Continental Congress for the same year. The first mention of William Hurry in the notes of the Pennsylvania Assembly is on March 4, 1777, when he was first appointed doorkeeper.<sup>22</sup>

Many people are under the impression that the Bell rang on July 4, 1776. This is an error as the following evidence shows.

In the minutes of the Council of Safety of Pennsylvania, for July 6, 1776, is found:<sup>23</sup>

The president of the Congress this day sent the following Resolve of Congress, which is directed to be entered on the minutes of this Board:

In Congress, 5th July 1776.

Resolved, That Copies of the Declaration be sent to the several Assemblies, Conventions, and Councils of Safety, and to the Several Commanding officers of the Continental Troops, that it be proclaimed in each of the United States, and at the Head of the Army.

By order of Congress. (*signed*)

JOHN HANCOCK, *president*

In consequence of the above Resolve, Letters were wrote to the Counties of Bucks, Chester, Northampton, Lancaster, and Berks, Inclosing copy of the said Declaration, requesting the same to be published on Monday next, as the places where the Election of Delegates are to be held.

*Ordered*, That the Sheriff of Philadelphia read or Cause to be read and proclaimed at the State-House, in the City of Philadelphia, on Monday, the Eighth day of July, instant, at 12 o'clock at noon of the same day, the Declaration of the Representatives of the United Colonies of America, and that he cause all his officers and the constables of the said city, to attend the reading thereof.

*Resolved*, That every Member of this Committee in or near the City be ordered to meet at the Committee Chamber before 12 o'clock on

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.* (5).

<sup>23</sup> *History of Philadelphia*, Vol. I, pp. 320-21. J. Thomas, Scharf & Thompson Westcott, Philadelphia, 1884.

Monday to proceed to the State House, where the Declaration of Independence is to be proclaimed.

The Committee of Inspection of the City and Liberties were requested to attend the Proclamation of Independence at the State-House, on Monday next, at 12 o'clock.

Christopher Marshall's diary gives the following for the period.<sup>24</sup>

July 6, 1776 Committee meeting in Philosophical Hall. Agreed that Declaration of Independence be declared at the State-House next second Day. At the same time the King's Arms there are to be taken down by nine Associators here appointed, who are to convey it to a pile of casks erected upon the commons, for the purpose of a bonfire, and the arms placed on the top. This being Election Day, I offered the motion . . . . July 8—at eleven went and met the Committee of Inspection at Philosophical Hall; went from there in a body to the lodge; joined the Committee of Safety (as called); went in a body to State-House yard, where, in the presence of a great concourse of people the Declaration of Independence was read by John Nixon. The company declared their approbation by three repeated huzzas. The King's Arms were taken down in the Court-Room, State-House, same time . . . . I went and dined at Paul Fook's. . . . Then he and the French Engineer went with me on the Commons where the same was proclaimed at each of the five Battalions. . . . There were bonfires, ringing bells, with other great demonstrations of joy upon the unanimity of agreement of the declaration.

Mrs. Deborah Logan,<sup>25</sup> who lived in the Norris Mansion at the time, says she distinctly heard the reading from the garden of that house. "The bells rang all day and almost all night," says John Adams, "and even the chimers chimed away"—alluding to the chimes of Christ Church, the congregation of which were suspected of lukewarmness to the Revolutionary cause, even when they were not accused of open devotion to Toryism.

Another diarist of the times describes the event as follows:<sup>26</sup>

There was a large assembly of people in the yard who had been summoned by the tolling of the Liberty Bell as there had been many times before on the occasion of some public event. Passing through the assembled crowd the procession of officials, who had charge of proclaiming this

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.* (2a).

state paper to the people, reached the platform, at which time the Liberty Bell ceased ringing. Colonel John Nixon, to whom the High Sheriff of Philadelphia had delegated the reading, stood up in the silence. He was a strong-voiced and open-featured man. He began reading with the words "In Congress, July 4, 1776, a Declaration of the Representatives of the United States of America" and read through the important document, and it was accepted with general applause and beautiful satisfaction.

Although Andrew McNair was re-elected doorkeeper on November 29, 1776, for the ensuing year, he did not live<sup>26a</sup> to fulfil the service, for on February 18, 1777, Jacob Lehre<sup>27</sup> was chosen to serve in place of the deceased McNair.

Jacob Lehre, however, soon resigned and on March 4, 1777, less than a month after his appointment, William Hurry was elected to the position.<sup>28</sup>

Hurry was employed at least up to November 3, 1780, when he was re-elected. In 1781 he died, aged sixty, and was buried in the churchyard of the Old Pine Street Presbyterian Church, Fourth and Pine streets, Philadelphia, of which he was one of the original members. His grave is marked by a small stone.

During the first year of Hurry's service when the British Army was about to occupy Philadelphia, the Bell was removed from the State House for its preservation. On September 18, 1777, it was conveyed with the heavy baggage of the American Army in a supply train of 700 wagons guarded by 200 North Carolina and Virginia cavalry to Germantown, Bethlehem and Allentown, Pennsyl-

<sup>26a</sup> No account of the death of Andrew McNair was found in Philadelphia papers of the period. Of course the Philadelphia papers were small and contained few obituaries and in 1777 it was not advisable to advertise the number of deaths. No record of burial has been found in the Old Pine Street Presbyterian Church nor in the Second Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. Vandalism by the British during their occupation of the Old Pine Street Church at the time of the Revolution resulted in the destruction of many stones and others have disappeared through the action of the weather and others have sunk below the ground level. The date of death and last resting-place still await discovery.

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.* (4).

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.* (5).

vania, the Bell finding refuge in Zion's Church, Allentown, which it reached safely, even though an old-time diary contains this entry:<sup>29</sup>

"September 29. The wagon which conveyed the State House Bell broke down in the street (Bethlehem) and had to be unloaded."

On June 27, 1778, it was returned to Philadelphia and again hung in the tower of Independence Hall.

No later records have been found of the names of the official ringers of the Bell other than that of Thomas Bowling,<sup>30</sup> 1827-36. Warwick says that this man lived in the steeple and the pipes from his stove protruded through one of its openings. It was while he was the ringer that the Bell cracked. During the funeral solemnities of John Marshall the Liberty Bell, while slowly tolling, cracked through its side, forever silenced but not less eloquent in its mute patriotic appeal to "proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." It had lived out its life of eighty-two years of usefulness as men live out their lives.

One of the earliest poems about the Bell is that attributed by some to Charles Brockden Brown.<sup>31</sup> This poem written by a patriotic American with rhythm and context to instil patriotism in all lovers of liberty should be as closely and permanently associated with the Liberty Bell as Longfellow's poem is associated with Paul Revere and the National Anthem with Fort McHenry.

There was a tumult in the city,  
In the quaint old Quaker town,  
And the streets were rife with people  
Pacing restless up and down  
People gathering at the corners,  
Where they whispered each to each,  
And the sweat stood on their temples  
With the earnestness of speech.

<sup>29</sup> Wayne Whipple, *The Story of the Liberty Bell*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Henry Altemus Co., pp. 121-23. 1910.

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.* (2), (29). Charles F. Warwick, *Keystone Commonwealth*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. cit.* (29).



As the bleak Atlantic currents  
Lash the wild Newfoundland shore,  
So they beat against the State House,  
So they surged against the door,  
And the mingling of their voices  
Made a harmony profound,  
Till the quiet street of Chestnut  
Was all turbulent with sound.

So they surged against the State House  
While all solemnly inside  
Sat the Continental Congress,  
Truth and reason for their guide,  
O'er a simple scroll debating  
Which, though simple it might be  
Yet should shake the cliffs of England  
With the thunders of the free.

Far aloft in the high steeple  
Sat the bellman, old and gray,  
He was weary of the tyrant  
And his iron-sceptered sway.  
So he sat with one hand ready  
On the clapper of the bell  
When his eye should catch the signal  
The long-expected news to tell.

See! See! the dense crowd quivers  
Through all its lengthy line  
As the boy beside the portal  
Hastens forth to give the sign;  
With his little hand uplifted,  
Breezes dallying with his hair,—  
Hark! with high, clear intonation  
Breaks his young voice in the air.

Hushed the people's swelling murmur  
Whilst the boy cries joyously—  
"Ring!" he shouts. "Ring, Grandpa,  
Ring, oh, ring for Liberty!"

Quickly at the given signal,  
The old bellman lifts his hand,  
Forth he sends the good news, making  
Iron music through the land.

How they shouted! What rejoicing!  
How the old Bell shook the air  
Till the clang of Freedom ruffled  
The calmly gliding Delaware!  
How the bonfires and the torches  
Lighted up the night's repose,  
And from the flames like fabled phoenix,  
Our glorious Liberty arose!

That old State House Bell is silent  
Hushed is now its clamorous tongue,  
But the spirit it awakened  
Still is living—ever young;  
And when we greet the smiling sunlight  
On the Fourth of each July,  
We will ne'er forget the bellman  
Who betwixt the earth and sky,  
Rang out loudly "Independence!"  
Which, please God, shall never die!









alexander, M.T.  
Andrew McNair and  
the Liberty bell, 1776.

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